

Social and cultural geography research group of the RGS-IBG
Wednesday 27th August 2008, 13.20

Minutes: Gail Davies and Phil Hubbard

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1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Louise Holt. The time of the meeting clashed with the plenary by Derek Gregory, so several other committee members were not able to make it.

2. Chair's Report.

The Chair gave a summary of the year's activities overseen by the group, and heralded the last year the most vibrant and vital for some time, thanking the Committee for their continuing efforts in ensuring the group enjoys a high profile. The year's activities included the second Materialities workshop (Durham), convened by Ben Anderson, Jo Maddern and Ian Cook; a reading weekend well-attended by new career researchers, organised by Elaine Ho and Kezia Barker; sponsorship of an AAG session (for the first time) as well as a slew of successful conference sessions at the RGS-IBG. The group has also re-established its web presence thanks to the efforts of Molly Hurley-Dupret and the Chair's on SCGRG 'blog' (both hosted on googlepages/blogger).

The Chair concluded, however, by noting some concerns that appear to be emerging about the remit of the group and the scope of its activities. Those present, including proposers of the new group, accordingly had a wide-ranging discussion about the formation of a new RGS Research Group on Geography and Social Justice, whose goals were summarised by Rachel Pain, who had asked to inform the committee about the new group.

There was considerable support for the invigoration of this strand of work in geography. However, there were mixed views on the implications the proposal might have for the SCGRG, and the visibility and representation of social and cultural geography within the RGS.

For some, the proposal of a new group is an unproblematic representation of the vibrancy of this strand of the discipline. It demonstrates the evolution of work in social and cultural geography; a further group strengthens the representation of critical geography with the RGS conference and committee meetings; and with RGS members able to belong to more than two groups it was seen as unlikely to have a major impact on existing SCGRG membership. In this sense, it was seen as adding value to the existing work in the SCGRG, with the expectation that the groups might collaborate in future events.

However, there were alternative views. A further group, with overlapping interests, raised questions about the perception of the work supported by the SCGRG. There were reports the SCGRG is felt to have become overly cultural in emphasis. Yet, given the written aims of the SCGRG to include work on 'social injustice, poverty, and exclusion' and 'identity, subjectivity, citizenship and belonging' a new group was seen as having potential to dilute current membership and activities. In effect, if members of the SCGRG began to mobilise enthusiastically behind a new group, it was felt it could reduce the overall visibility of this form of research within the SCGRG, and possibly within British social and cultural geography. It might also require a re-writing of the term of reference/mission statement of the SCGRG so that overlap between the two groups, and any conflict of aims, was minimised.

The proposers reported the proposal was currently with the RGS. Given the importance of this kind of work to much of that ongoing within SCGRG, we hoped to continue this dialogue at the conference in January 2009, and to work with individuals and groups pursuing this important strand of work in the future.

The Chair concluded the discussion, which was necessarily limited by constraints of time, by suggesting that the SCGRG would consult its full committee about the proposed new group, and report views to the Research subcommittee on 27th Sept as requested by Catherine Souch.

3. Treasurer's report

Louise Holt circulated the Treasurers' report in absentia. Last year's balance was £3164.20 in August 2007. The balance in August 2008 is £3504.62. The main source of income was the RGS subsidy of £550.

The SCGRG reading weekend was subsidised by an RGS grant (£400) and funds from the SCGRG (£551.45, including subsidies for food and accommodation and 7 travel bursaries). Participants met the remainder of the costs for this meeting.

A total grant of £400 was awarded by the SCGRG to support a series of Materialities conferences. There are funds of £277.63 remaining for the last of these events.

The £350 sponsorship set aside for the AAG session has not been required as the speaker it was to support has covered their costs from other sources.

The bank account is being switched from the Royal Bank of Scotland to the Co-operative Bank, which provides Internet banking.

4. SCGRG Committee

The following people have reached the end of their 3-year term on the SCGRG committee: Jo Maddern, Rachel Colls, Darren Smith, and David Land. Phil Hubbard agreed to inform these people and to thank them for their contributions. Molly Hurley Depret has asked to step down from her responsibilities for the web. In addition, Jo Norcup was welcomed to the committee after her appointment mid year to support and strengthen schools links.

Given the large committee it was not felt necessary to make new appointments to the committee, which now comprises: Ben Anderson, Kezia Barker (postgrad rep), Amanda Claremont, David Crouch, Gail Davies (Secretary), Russell Hitchings, Elaine Ho, Louise Holt (Treasurer), Peter Hopkins (Membership rep), Phil Hubbard (Chair), Jamie Lorimer, Jo Norcup, Emma Roe.

However, there will be a need to inform members of the group of vacancies for chair and secretary, which will be coming in August 2009.

ACTION: note to be sent to all the members in advance of next year AGM.

5. Items for report/discussion

- Website management

Given Molly's departure from website development, this was reviewed. It is still incomplete.

A three-fold strategy to take this forward was agreed. To provide content, all funding/support given by the SCGRG should be accompanied by a request to provide a short summary of the event. The committee should all be given access to the password to enable them to post content. There should also be a general call to identify someone to take over the web co-ordination activities – to solicit content, to edit if necessary and ensure links are active.

ACTION: Gail to contact session convenors for all sessions sponsored at the RGS to provide summaries of their sessions. Phil to provide web information to committee members and circulate a note to identify anyone to take on the role of web co-ordinator.

- Update on materialities conference

The final materialities conference is pencilled in for 15th of December 2009 at Exeter. Ian Cook and John Wylie will organize the event under the title 'end games'.

The group supported the provision of a further £250 for travel bursaries for this event for those postgraduates and early career researchers with no other forms of funding.

- **SCGRG conference sponsorship**

The group discussed the process for conference sponsorship. Again, there is some frustration over the way this is currently working. It is time consuming to reduce the number of proposals for sponsorship submitted to the number agreed by the RGS, only to find unsuccessful proposals are supported as standalone sessions when space opens up in the schedule. It is also potentially alienating for those submitting unsuccessful proposals. The group recognised this is a difficult balance for the RGS, but many felt in future that it might be in the group's interest to submit all sessions it would like to support.

There was also the potential identified for further collaboration with other research groups to try to avoid overlaps.

ACTION: Significant dates to be circulate to all members and committee following the September RGS meeting.

- **Reading weekend**

The reading weekend was recognised as a successful and valuable addition to the activities of the SCGRG, despite relatively small numbers able to attend. The event was able to mark the contribution of Denis Cosgrove to the field of cultural geography, and overall received very good feedback. The group thanked Kezia and Elaine for their work in organizing this.

There was general support for running a similar event in future, which could benefit from Kezia and Elaine's experience. By finding a date that avoided bank holidays, and was advertised earlier, it was felt numbers would increase. Hebden Bridge was felt to be a good venue, though the organizers indicated they would have liked further ideas for papers.

ACTION: Phil and Gail to solicit volunteers to take on organization of the meeting before Christmas.

- **Future conference plans**

'Invigorating new social geographies: politics, practices and opportunities for social and cultural geography In the UK'. To be held Thursday 30th Friday 31st of January 2009, Brighton. The group agreed to sponsor this conference, and encouraged Kath Brown to bid for an RGS grant for travel and accommodation costs.

'Geographies of Education' 8-9th Sept 2009 (Loughborough). The group received details of this conference.

RGS-IBG 2009 is to be held in Manchester. The conference title is Geography, Knowledge and Society. There were no immediate ideas for sessions for SCGRG sponsorship.

ACTION: A note will be circulated to all members of the group once the deadlines for sponsorship are agreed following the sub-committee meeting at the end of September.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 14.25.